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Cal Poly Professor Appointed Afghan Ambassador to Germany

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Cal Poly Social Sciences Professor Maliha Zulfacar, a native of Afghanistan who has been active in the rebuilding of that country since 2001, has been appointed as Afghanistan's Ambassador to Germany.

Zulfacar will serve her term as ambassador while on sabbatical from her teaching and studies at Cal Poly. She is the first woman to be appointed as an ambassador from the nation of Afghanistan. She departed for Afghanistan, and then Berlin, Sept. 1.

"It is a great honor for me," Zulfacar said. "With that honor comes much responsibility. Having been the first woman appointed as an ambassador from Afghanistan gives me the opportunity to serve my country of birth and also to demonstrate that when Afghan women are given the chance for education, they too will be able to participate effectively in the reconstruction of the country."

Zulfacar is a professor of Sociology at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo.

Commenting on her ambassadorial appointment, President Warren Baker observed "For all of us at Cal Poly who know Dr. Maliha Zulfacar, it is no surprise that she would be called to serve in this distinguished and important role by her native land. I am confident she will bring to her ambassadorial duties the same wisdom, insight and enterprising spirit that she has shown as a Cal Poly professor. I am also pleased that she will be returning to Cal Poly and that our students will benefit from the knowledge and experience she gains from this extraordinary leadership opportunity. We all wish her the best of luck, as she embarks for Afghanistan and Germany."

Since the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, Zulfacar has been leading a cross-continental life. She spends the academic year at Cal Poly, teaching classes about global ethnic conflict and geopolitics and coordinating various projects and fundraisers to benefit Afghanistan's educational system and infrastructure. She spends her summers teaching social science and establishing programs at Kabul University.

She was born and raised in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. She left Afghanistan attend college in the United States after her graduation from Rabia Balkhi High School in Kabul, returning to teach at Kabul University. Zulfacar was a sociology professor at Kabul University before fleeing the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 for Germany.

She lived in Germany from 1979 to 1985, becoming fluent in German and studying at the German Technical Institute at Braunschweig. In 1985, she came to the United States and settled in California to raise her two children. She joined the Cal Poly Social Sciences Department in 1988. She returned to Germany in 1995, to earn her doctorate in sociology in 1998 from Paderborn University. Her doctoral thesis compared and contrasted the experience of Afghan immigrants in Germany and the United States.

Zulfacar has also produced two documentaries on the lives of the average citizens of Afghanistan. Her first, "Guftago: Dialog with an Afghan Village," was made in 2001, documenting her trip with an international delegation of women touring mountain villages in 2000.

Her second, "Kabul Transit," was co-produced with Williams College Professor David Edwards. The film follows city residents in the course of their daily lives and listens to their stories of the past and their hopes for the future. It was screened at the 2006 Los Angeles Film Festival.

For more details on Ambassador Zulfacar, visit Cal Poly Magazine online at:

http://www.calpolynews.calpoly.edu/magazine/06_summer/zulfacar.html

or

<http://www.calpolynews.calpoly.edu/magazine/summer'02/zulfacar.html>

To read the NPR profile on Ambassador Zulfacar and her work with Kabul residents, visit:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5151380>

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Editors note: For a jpg of Ambassador Zulfacar, contact Teresa Hendrix at thendrix@calpoly.edu.

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